

Exploring Asylum Hill: Integrative Medicine at Saint Francis

Saint Francis Hospital and Medical Center is well known throughout the state and beyond as a first-class medical institution with a full array of specialties available to those who need them. What is far less well known is the Center for Integrative Medicine. The more connected the world becomes, the more we realize that people from other cultures have a lot to offer us. And just as the AHNA Welcoming Committee seeks to strengthen those cultural links of the immigrants in Asylum Hill with the broader community, Saint Francis is doing much the same related to health and medicine, but reaching far beyond Asylum Hill.

It all began 13 years ago when Sharon O'Brien who at the time was Health Promotion Coordinator, found inpatients who were undergoing traditional Western medical treatment were fairly frequently asking for massage or energy therapy. She decided to



Dr. Mueller with patient

photo from St. Franciscare

organize a group through Volunteer Services to fill this need and give the Hospital some degree of oversight since it was important that all providers be credentialed.

Five years later they hired their first massage therapist part time. Dr. Kathleen Mueller, who is now the Medical Director of the Center was hired two years after that.

Today, Sharon is manager of the Center for Integrative Medicine and there is a staff of 7 plus with more than 20 credentialed consultants in areas as varied as acupuncture, massage, yoga, holistic nutrition, art therapy and T'ai Chi. And they're not done either. What they have found that works best is when the Center responds to the requests of the patients and staff. If they try to insert something that

they think will help it's not often as well received and not nearly as effective.

The really great thing is that they have recently made everything they do available to the entire staff of Saint Francis at reduced cost. It certainly makes sense to have the people working with those in need of healing to be as healthy as possible.

There are still some traditions that just have not made it to Saint Francis as yet, among them Chinese herbal medicine and Indian Ayurvedic medicine, only because the opportunity has not presented itself as yet. Even so the Center at Saint Francis is the most extensive inpatient and outpatient integrative medicine program in New England.

Not surprisingly, this department has kept careful records of all their patients and the results are impressive. Patients heal faster, experience less pain and have fewer complications.

Over the last three years they have been able to offer acupuncture to more people at a lower cost by doing it in groups of up to seven people at a time.

Various massage therapies as well as Yoga and meditation are such an important part of the program that they offer 20-minute complementary treatments for anyone undergoing chemotherapy or any inpatient. And

the nurses have noticed about a 50% reduction in pain and anxiety levels that reduce call button activity as a result.

For Asylum Hill residents, especially the 30% born outside the U.S. this is very good news. Our neighbor, Saint Francis is open to integrating healing practices from around the world into their medical practice, and this is just one example of their commitment to a healthier neighborhood, city and region.

For more information go to <http://www.stfranciscare.org/integrative/> or you can call them at 860-714-4450



Group acupuncture

photo from St. FrancisCare